

Washington, D.C. - In response to a recently revealed Transportation Security Administration (TSA) proposal to cut the number of screening personnel for Stewart International Airport, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today called on U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff to stop the proposal in its track and instead increase the number of screeners. Hinchey argued in a letter sent today to Chertoff that the proposed cuts were being made based on past data on the use of the airport and failed to take into account the fact that many more flights will be operating out of Stewart Airport with new Jet Blue and AirTran Airways service.

"I am alarmed that Stewart Airport could face significant problems in the near future as the number of passengers rises sharply with new air service and the number of screeners is reduced or held at current levels," Hinchey wrote to Chertoff. "I urge you to quickly take action to remedy this situation and ensure that TSA can accommodate the expected increase in air passengers in the coming weeks and months. The need for quick reconsideration of TSA staffing levels is particularly critical since there will likely be a lag time between the authorization of additional screening staff and the completion of their recruitment and training."

TSA recently told Stewart Airport officials that the level of federal screeners, which is currently at 30 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs), would be reduced to 25 FTE's for Fiscal Year 2007 as a result of a decrease in air passengers who used the airport in 2006. Hinchey argued to Chertoff that the number of passengers expected to use Stewart Airport in 2007 could more than double from the 2006 level to as high as 375,000 as a result of new JetBlue and AirTran service. Additionally, the airport continues to aggressively recruit additional airlines, which would further increase the number of passengers.

"The success of these airlines and Stewart Airport is vitally important to the economic and transportation needs of the Hudson Valley," Hinchey wrote to Chertoff. "I am quite concerned that TSA's inadequate staffing will negatively impact the airport -- specifically the recently announced new passenger services -- if the agency does not provide sufficient screening staff to meet the anticipated passenger growth. Furthermore, inadequate TSA staffing could negatively impact the quality of screening as fewer employees struggle to meet increasing work demands. This is particularly alarming in light of the fact the Stewart Airport is located less than 20 miles from the Indian Point Nuclear Facility and approximately 50 miles from New York City."

Hinchey said he would continue to aggressively press the Homeland Security for action on TSA screeners at Stewart Airport.

